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GOVERNMENT ARCHITECTURE

In an address made at the second annual convention of the American Federation of Arts, May, 1911, Secretary MacVeagh called attention to the fact that the United States was the greatest builder that the world had ever known and that its opportunities of influencing architecture throughout the whole country were consequently enormous. At the same time he mentioned the fact that a great improvement had been made in recent years in the spirit of the Government in respect to architecture and in the character of the buildings erected. This improvement dates from the passage of the "Tarsney Act" in 1893, which allowed the Government to se-

cure designs and supervision of its buildings by the most talented architects of the country. The first building given out under authority of the Tarsney Bill was the Court House and Post Office at Norfolk, Va., which, as the result of a competition, was awarded to Wyatt and Nolting, of Baltimore, in 1897. Since then there have been numerous instances such as the New York Custom House to Cass Gilbert, the Baltimore Custom House to Hornblower and Marshall, the Federal Building, Indianapolis, to Rankin and Kellogg, etc. This has, in fact, produced an era of good building, stimulating both private practice and the work done in the office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. Notwithstanding, however, the unanimity of opinion with regard to the progress made in this direction a clause was introduced into the Sundry Civil Bill, passed by the House of Representatives at the present session, which repealed the Tarsney Act—a distinctly retrogressive step. The excuse for this is economy, but is ill-founded, close scrutiny showing that the work given out is done at no greater cost than that executed in the office of the Supervising Architect. But even so, such economy would, in the end, prove extravagant. The Government of the United States, the "greatest builder in the world," can not afford to build badly, incorrectly, inartistically. As Secretary MacVeagh himself has said, every building which is put up by the Government (about two hundred a year) should be an answer to the demands for attractiveness through art and beauty upon the part of the community in which it is placed. It should indeed be even more than this—an example of good art which would not only stimulate civic pride but cultivate taste and establish a standard. The American Federation of Arts has sent a circular letter to its chapters and members asking that they urge their Senators and Representatives to see that this clause is eliminated in conference before the Sundry Civil Bill can become a law, and so prevent a decided backward step on the part of the Government.